



**Ombwdsmon  
Ombudsman**  
Cymru · Wales

# **A New Chapter Unfolds**

## **Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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July 2024



We can provide a summary of this document in accessible formats, including Braille, large print and Easy Read. To request, please contact us:

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**Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg.**

**This document is also available in Welsh.**



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# **A New Chapter Unfolds Annual Report and Accounts**

**of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales  
for the year ended 31 March 2024**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## Our role

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We have three main roles.



We investigate complaints about public services.



We consider complaints about councillors breaching the Code of Conduct.



We drive systemic improvement of public services and standards of conduct in local government in Wales.

## Our ambition

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People of Wales feel that public services treat them fairly and respond when things go wrong.



Welsh public services listen to individuals and use their complaints to learn and improve.



Welsh local government is trusted to deliver the highest standards of conduct.



The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales continues to be an influential and respected voice in public service improvement.

## Our principles

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We are independent, impartial, fair and open to all who need us.

# A word from the Ombudsman

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**This annual report reflects first year since I published my Strategic Plan 2023-26 'A New Chapter'.**

I am pleased to see, that we have started to make good progress towards achieving the ambitious goals set out in the Strategic Plan.

We saw a record increase in the number of people contacting us with complaints about public services and the behaviour of local councillors. We handled over 10,000 cases, closing more than we ever have done before and reduced the costs for each case and investigation. This is the most efficient we have ever been.

We reduced our aging cases, those over 12 months old, by 70% by the end of the year. These cases are often the most complex and distressing for the people making the complaint. We are now well on track to meeting our objective to reduce this proportion to zero by the end of March 2025.

Our investigation and support staff dug deep to meet this target. Our people are our most important asset and I have never been more proud of their commitment and hard work.

To become more accessible, we have engaged communities where we have

low complaint numbers, resulting in greater awareness of our services with people from these communities. We are now focusing on growing the number of complaints from young people, people from diverse nationalities and people who face socio-economic hardship.

People and public service providers believe we are independent and that we have a positive impact on improving public services in Wales. Regrettably, the actions of an individual, which fell far short of the standards of conduct we expect from our staff, prompted questions about our impartiality and marred what has been an extremely productive and positive year. We are working hard to regain that trust. The current independent review, to determine whether our consideration of Councillor Code of Conduct complaints has been free from political bias, is a vital step that moves us forward to restoring the reputation and standing of our Office.


**Michelle Morris**

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales




# Strategic Aim 1: Deliver justice




We received **17%** more new enquiries and complaints about public services and Code of Conduct.



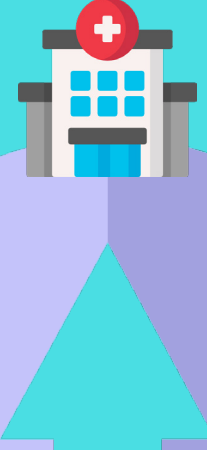
We closed **6%** more complaints about public services and Code of Conduct.



We had **4%** more new public service complaints:

-  36% were about healthcare
-  18% were about housing
-  17% were about complaint handling

Clinical treatment makes up **44%** of all health complaints.



We intervened (found that an organisation got things wrong and should put things right) in **20%** of complaints about public services...

... and 3 out of 4 times, we intervened early, without having to conduct a full investigation.



**97%**

Organisations complied with 97% of our recommendations due during the year.



We received **16% more** complaints about the Code of Conduct



**55%** of these new complaints were about promotion of equality and respect.

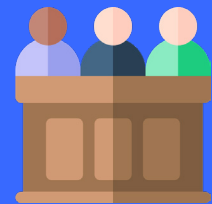
**54%** of new investigations were about councillors at Town and Community Councils.



**21**

We made 21 referrals of Code of Conduct complaints made to the Adjudication Panel for Wales or local Standards Committees.

The Adjudication Panel for Wales and Standards Committees upheld and found breaches in **85%** of our referrals they considered in 2023/24.



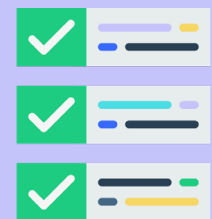
We upheld only **8%** of requests for review of our decisions, which gives us confidence that our process is sound.



**67%** of cases required little or no feedback from our new Service Quality process.



**40%** of people - and **98%** of those satisfied with the outcome of their complaint - were happy with our service.

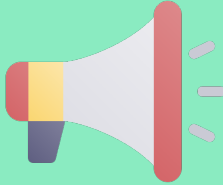



# Strategic Aim 2: Increasing Accessibility and Inclusion

87% of people feel they can approach us if they needed to.




83% of people said we were easy to contact.




We took 103 oral complaints.

79 people asked us for additional support.



We launched our new website with new accessibility features.




61 people asked us to communicate with them in Welsh, more than double than last year.

Cymraeg



24% of people hear about our service via word of mouth. This rises to 40% with young people.



We published our new Strategic Equality Plan 2023 - 2026





# Strategic Aim 3: Increasing impact of proactive improvement work

We are working with 56 public bodies delivering the model complaints policy and delivered 94 training sessions on good complaint handling.



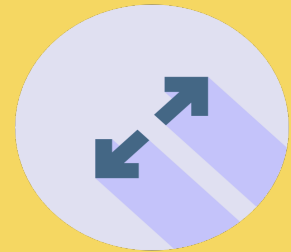
We have provided 500 training sessions since 2020.

We published 8 Public Interest Reports, about serious cases related to healthcare and provision of gypsy and traveller accommodation.



We consulted the public on our next 'Own Initiative' investigation – which looks at carers needs assessments.

We completed 3 extended investigations, when we are already investigating a problem and we extend the investigation to other issues or complainants.



For the fifth time, we published a casebook in which we highlight complaints where human rights or equality issues have either been raised as part of the complaint or have been central to our findings.



# Strategic Aim 4: Healthy, efficient and accountable organisation

We had no median gender pay gap.



It cost us 12% less to consider each complaint this year.



We produced 62 tonnes of CO2 in emissions.



A lower proportion of our staff told us that they had good or fluent Welsh language skills.



We reduced the amount of waste we produced by 68%, recycled 87% and sent none to landfill.





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